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SUBJECT: PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR MEETS WITH PRESIDENT ORTEGA

¶1. Summary. On September 4, Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams met with President Daniel Ortega to review the work of the Peace Corps in Nicaragua as well as to provide observations from his September 2-4 visit and to discuss areas for future cooperation. After expressing concern about the ongoing crisis in Honduras and the presence of the U.S. military on Colombian bases, Ortega praised the work of the Peace Corps and its work to improve conditions in some of Nicaragua's poorest communities. Director Williams emphasized that the Peace Corps is committed to working with Nicaragua to help people in these communities and will look for new ways to expand its work in the country. Education, Health and Agriculture Ministers similarly lauded the work of Peace Corps and USAID in helping to foster Nicaragua's development. End Summary.

¶2. Ortega opened the meeting noting the emergency situation facing Nicaragua due to the spread of H1N1 virus, which had even affected members of his own household. Ortega reiterated the GON's concerns over the ongoing crisis in Honduras and welcomed the recent U.S. decision to cut assistance to the de facto government. In addition, he emphasized that "all of Latin America" is worried about the presence of the U.S. military at bases in Colombia. Turning to the Peace Corps, Ortega welcomed the visit of Director Williams and praised the history and ongoing programs of the Corps in Nicaragua. Ortega recalled how the Peace Corps remained credible and active in Nicaragua through the 1960s and 1970s and emphasized that the direct engagement of Peace Corps volunteers in Nicaragua's poorest communities was vital to Nicaragua's continued development.

¶3. Director Williams thanked Ortega for the opportunity to meet and noted that Nicaragua was the second country he had visited as Director (after the Dominican Republic), a testament to the success of the programs in the country. Williams emphasized that the Peace Corps, and the U.S. Government, is committed to working "arm in arm" with Nicaragua to help people in the poorest communities and that he would continue to look for new ways to continue the work.

¶4. Education Minister de Castilla lauded the work of the Peace Corps and USAID in helping to improve Nicaragua's education system. Calling the Peace Corps' programs "extraordinary," De Castilla noted the successes of the Peace Corps, especially in the areas of entrepreneurship training for secondary students and English-language training. Furthermore, De Castilla praised the work of USAID's "Excellencia" program and work in curriculum development. Without USAID's help, De Castilla added, "it would have been impossible to transform the curriculum." Building on the same theme, Agriculture Minister Bucardo noted the work of the Peace Corps in directly helping communities address environmental issues, particularly water problems as Nicaragua faces ongoing challenges of drought and lack of access to clean water. Finally, Health Minister Gonzalez noted the community-level contributions of the Peace Corps in various areas of preventive health, including maternal-child

care and HIV/AIDS prevention.

15. Ortega concluded the meeting by noting that the visit of Peace Corps Director Williams demonstrated that "despite our differences, we (the U.S. and Nicaragua) are working together, not just in counter-narcotics, but also to eradicate poverty, to open up new space for cooperation, and to build confidence between our two countries."  
CALLAHAN